

This symposium will utilize an expert panel of Professor Amanda Mitra, Associate Professor Amanda Sturgill, and Assistant Professor Phillip Motley and facilitated by Cathy Hamilton (Director of the Office of Leadership and Service-Learning, University of North Carolina-Greensboro) to explore strategies that can be implemented at a home institution prior to an international service-learning project so that students will gain the most benefit from the experience. In the context of a service-learning course, preparation means getting ready for the project; understanding the project goals; becoming familiar with the community partner's needs; acquiring knowledge of appropriate tools, techniques, or technologies; and getting ready to work within the community partner's environment (Mak, Watson, & Hadden, 2011). When students work with other populations, they also need guidance to recognize that the culture is a significant factor, to learn the ways culture is important, and to develop behaviors and strategies for navigating across cultural differences (Galiardi & Cohen, 2011). Because intercultural competence focuses on understanding rather than judgment, adequate preparation can help students appreciate ways their work is being done in partnership with the community rather than as a service or

act of charity.

Our work suggests that students who grasp the nuances of the cultural domain in which they work tend to produce better results for both the course and community partner. We will describe activities that we have successfully designed and implemented for students participating in service-learning projects in Africa, Central America, and Asia. A variety of expert experiences will be drawn upon to demonstrate effective strategies and approaches for cultural and service preparation.

References

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